USDA Foreign Agricultural Service
GAIN Report
Global Agriculture Information Network
Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 7/7/2006

GAIN Report Number: FR6037

France

Biotechnology

Significant Increase in GM Corn Planting in 2006

2006

Approved by:
Elizabeth Berry
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:
Marie-Cécile Hénard

Report Highlights:
French Bt corn acreage is expected to boom from 500 ha in 2005 to 5,000 ha in 2006, as a result of the economic advantages experienced by Bt corn growers in 2005. The pervasive presence of the European corn borer in Southern France provides strong incentive for further expansion. However, that incentive must be weighed against French consumer resistance. While the French Biotech Bill is still pending in the Parliament, farmers are adopting coexistence practices based on studies by the French corn growers association (AGPM) and the recommendations of seed companies.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Paris [FR1]
[FR]

In 2005, French farmers planted their first commercial crop of Bt corn (MON-810) on 500 to 1,000 hectares (see FR 5060) since 1999. Previously, farmers had been wary of planting genetically modified varieties due to lack of market demand in France because of consumer and industry resistance, traceability rules and a lack of transparency for coexistence liability. In 2005, due to a drought in Spain, French farmers were able to sell their biotech crop to this market for use in animal feed. In addition, in the southern part of the country, the conventional corn crop is threatened by the European corn borer. Bt corn is viewed as providing an effective and profitable remedy against the European corn borer in this region, which contains 400,000 to 500,000 hectares, i.e., almost a third of the total French corn acreage. Due to the agronomic and economic benefits experienced in 2005, French farmers are expected to expand the acreage of Bt corn to 4,000-5,000 hectares for 2006.

Also in 2006, the French farm community had been hoping to receive some legal clarity in the coexistence area. The French Biotech Bill, which will set rules on GM and non-GM coexistence (see FR6008) was voted on by the Senate last March but, since May, has been languishing in the National Assembly. Coexistence is a controversial issue and politicians are wary of acting on this legislation in the current pre-presidential and Parliamentary campaign period before the elections of May 2007.

As a result, biotech corn producers, with the help of seed companies and the French corn growers association (AGPM), are organizing at the local level to manage coexistence. AGPM, based on its studies on corn pollen flow (POECB program, see FR5084), is recommending that farmers establish buffer zones of at least 25 meters, and an additional 10 meter pollen barrier, when planting next to conventional corn fields. AGPM's studies concluded that the adventitious presence of biotech pollen is well below 0.9 percent under these planting conditions but some seed companies recommend buffer zones of 50 meters to further minimize the risk of gene flow. Conventional corn grown within the buffer zone is mixed with the Bt corn at harvest and labelled as a biotech product.